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Iwai et al.

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(54) **IN-VEHICLE ILLUMINATING DEVICE**

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(21) Appl. No.: **12/403,004**

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(30) **Foreign Application Priority Data**

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

(51) **Int. Cl.**
B60Q 3/04 (2006.01)

An in-vehicle illuminating device **1** capable of efficiently guiding luminous flux emitted from a luminous source to a light guiding body. The in-vehicle illuminating device **1** is provided with a rod-shaped light guiding body **13** which reflects, on its inner surface, light rays incident from an optical incidence plane **16** provided at an end **13a** to guide the light rays to the other end longitudinally provided, a lamp **19** which emits light to a direction orthogonal to the longitudinal direction of the rod-shaped light guiding body **13** and is arranged in the vicinity of the optical incidence plane **16**, and an light introducing body **20** for introducing the luminous flux emitted from the lamp **19** to the optical incidence plane **16**. The light introducing body **20** allows the optical incidence plane **16** to be set within a range of the luminous flux emitted from the lamp **19**.

(52) **U.S. Cl.** **362/489**; 362/559

(58) **Field of Classification Search** 362/559, 362/471, 479, 482, 588, 478, 487
See application file for complete search history.

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4 Claims, 8 Drawing Sheets

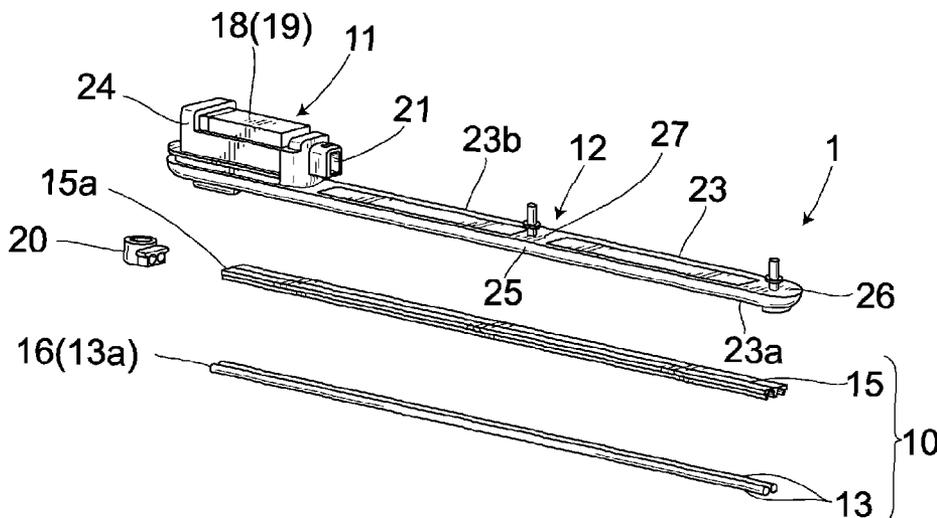


FIG.1

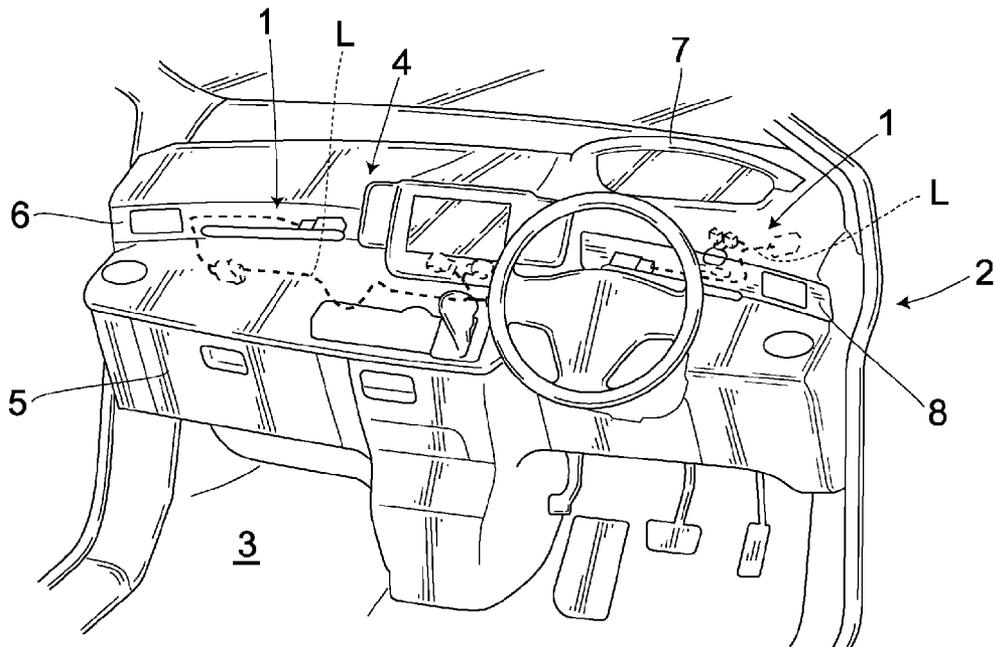


FIG.2

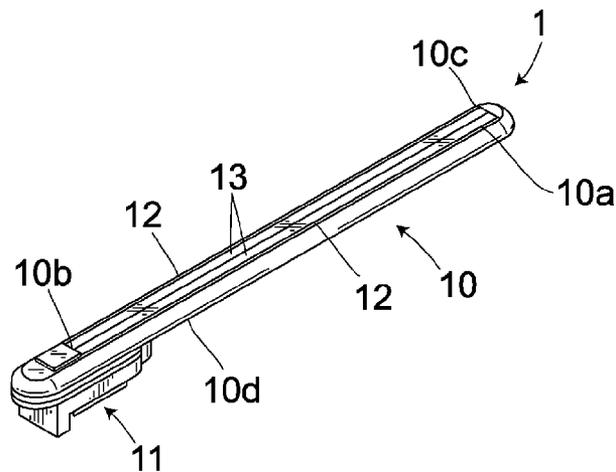


FIG.5A

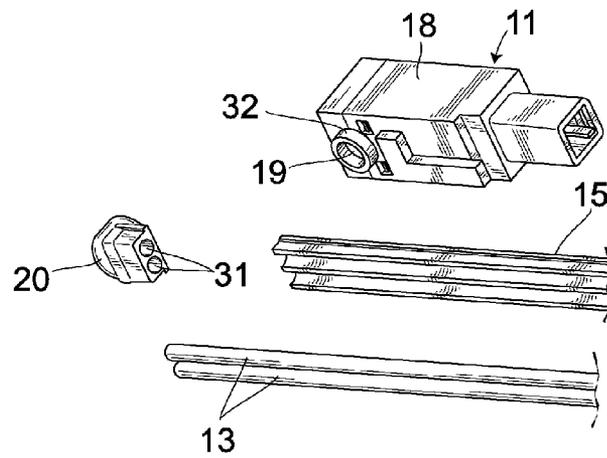


FIG.5B

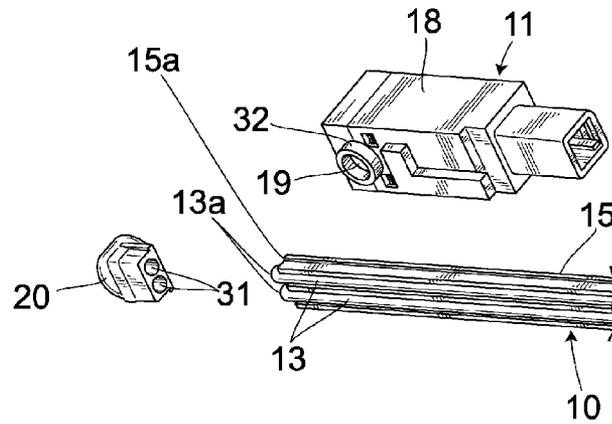


FIG.5C

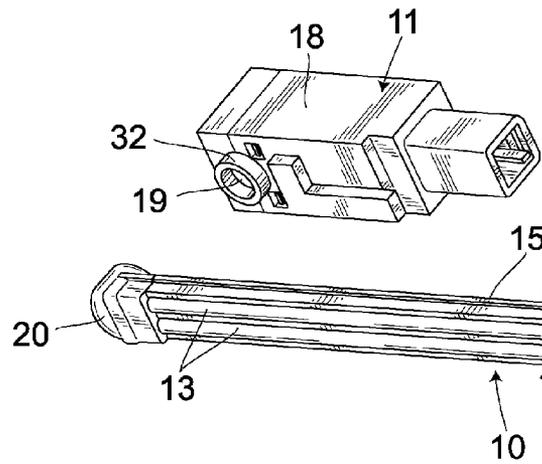


FIG.5D

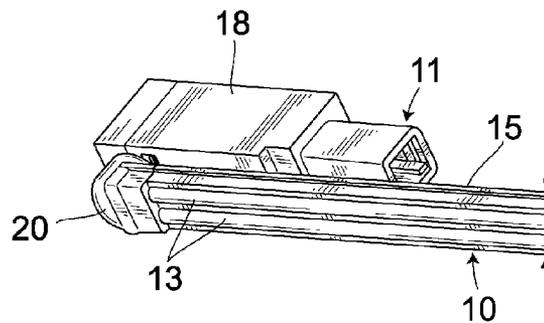


FIG.6A

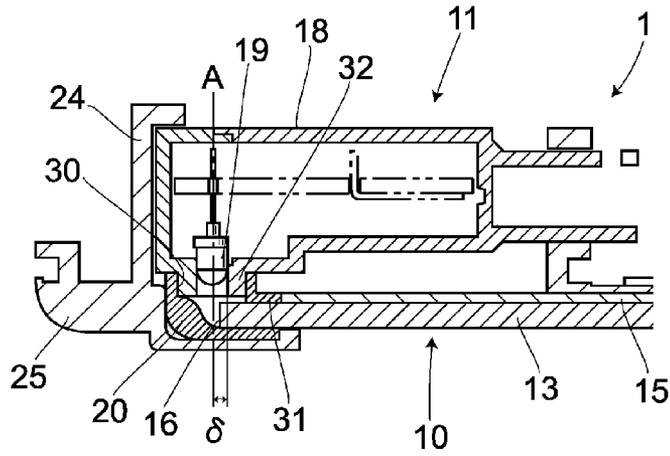


FIG.6B

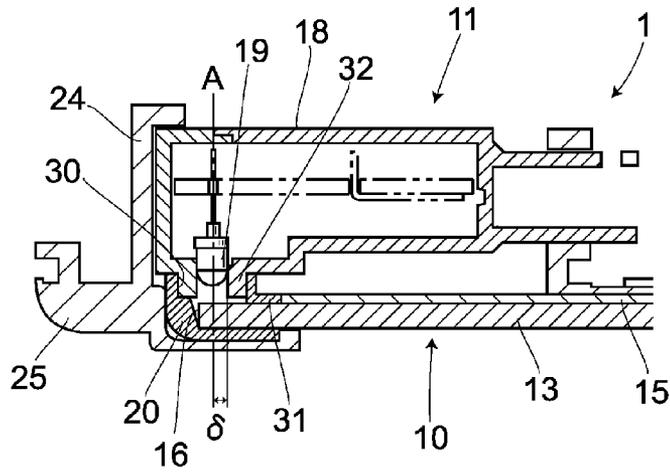


FIG.6C

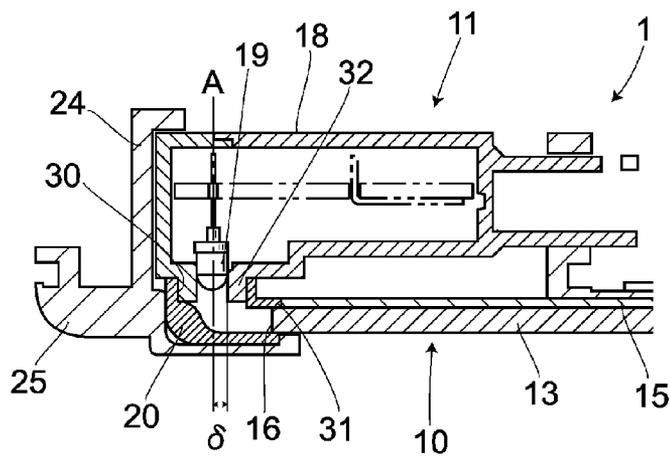


FIG. 7

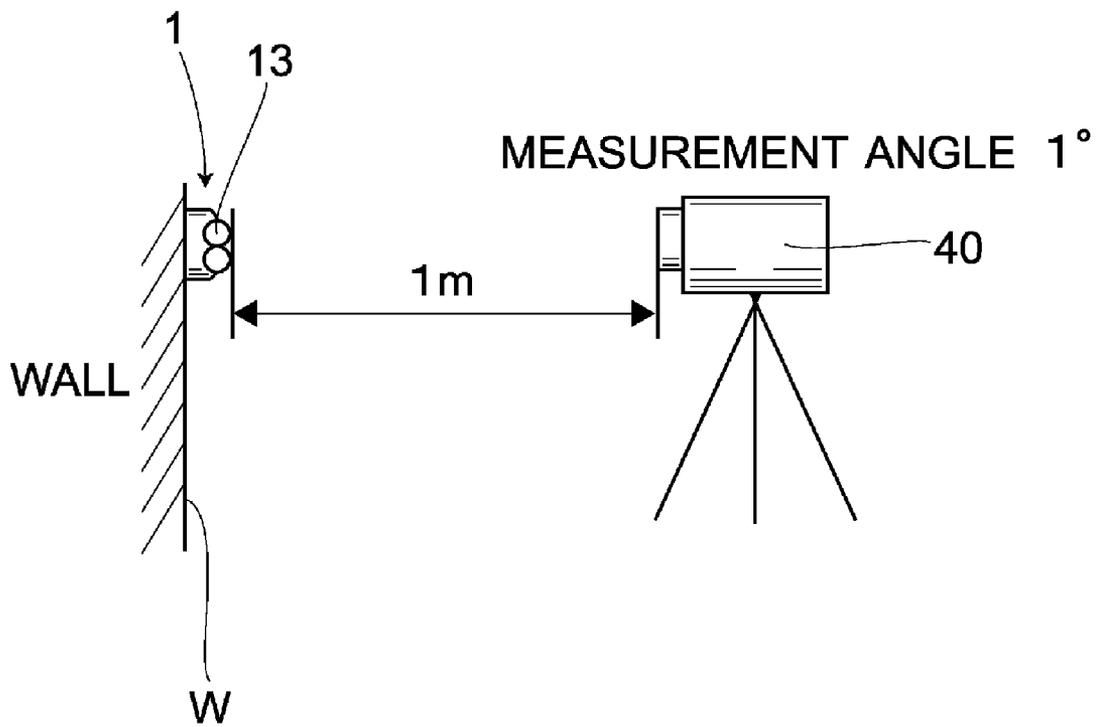


FIG.8

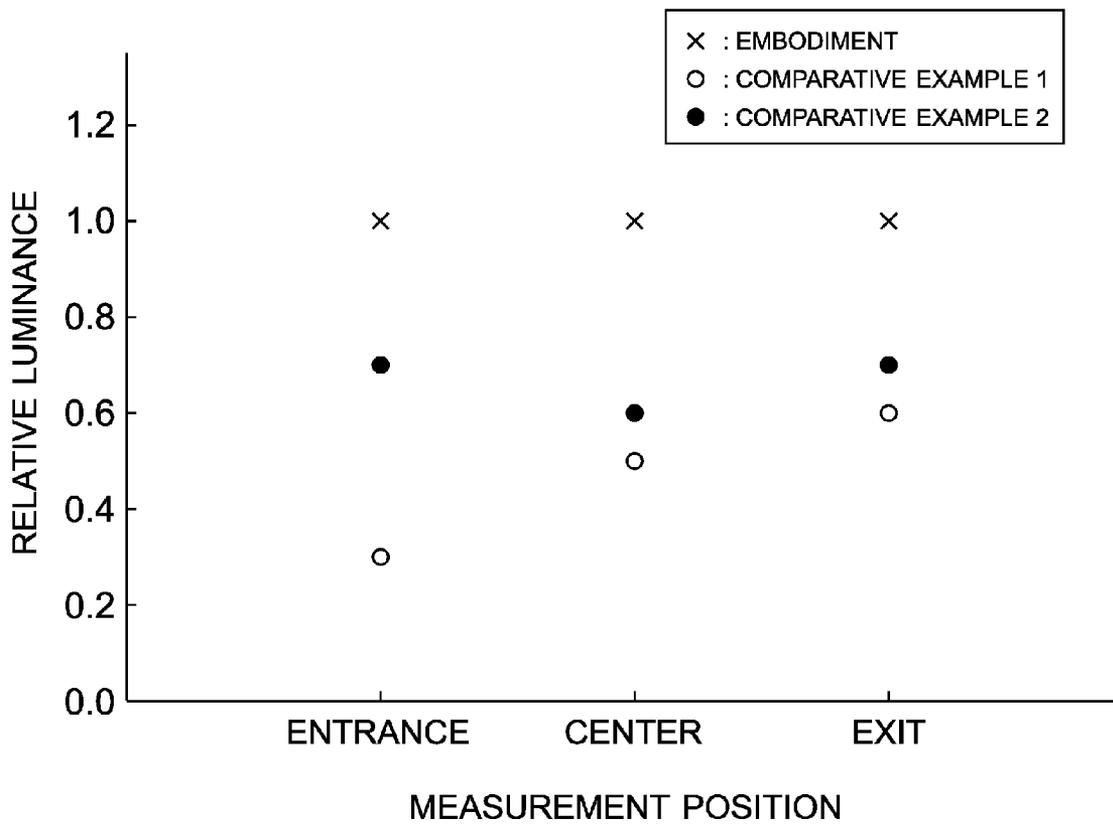


FIG.9

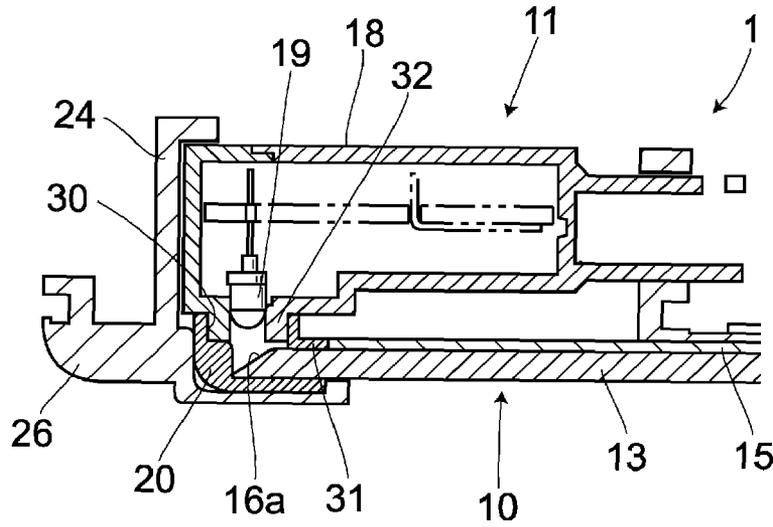
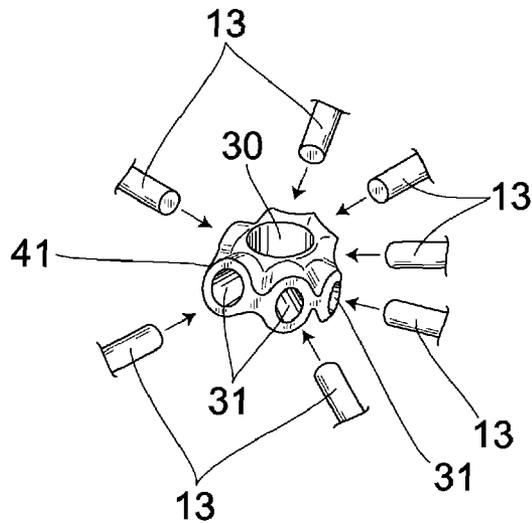


FIG.10



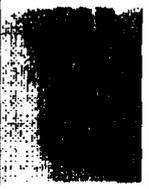
EMBODIMENT (BAR INSERTION AMOUNT)	OPTICAL GUIDING BAR POSITION (BAR INSERTION AMOUNT)	LUMINANCE (IN)	RELATIVE LUMINANCE (IN)	LUMINANCE (CTR)	RELATIVE LUMINANCE (CTR)	LUMINANCE (OUT)	RELATIVE LUMINANCE (OUT)	EFFICIENCY	LIGHT APPEARANCE
0 (STANDARD 7mm)		10.800 cd/m ²	1.0	0.941 cd/m ²	1.0	0.471 cd/m ²	1.0	1.0	
COMPARATIVE EXAMPLE 1 +1		7.714 cd/m ²	0.7	0.548 cd/m ²	0.6	0.314 cd/m ²	0.7	0.7	
COMPARATIVE EXAMPLE 2 -5		3.528 cd/m ²	0.3	0.431 cd/m ²	0.5	0.274 cd/m ²	0.6	0.5	

FIG. 11

IN-VEHICLE ILLUMINATING DEVICE

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the invention

The present invention relates to an in-vehicle illuminating device, and more particularly, to an in-vehicle illuminating device suitably used for an in-vehicle illuminating system arranged in an in-vehicle instrument panel or the like.

2. Description of the Related Art

Heretofore, there has been known, as an in-vehicle illuminating device arranged in an in-vehicle instrument panel, for example, a device comprising a rod-shaped light guiding body and a luminous source, such as an LED (Light-Emitting Diode) arranged at an end of the rod-shaped light guiding body to guide luminous flux emitted from the luminous source from the first end of the rod-shaped light guiding body to the second end thereof.

In a case where such device is designed so that the luminous source is arranged coaxially with the rod-shaped light guiding body to emit luminous flux in parallel with a longitudinal direction of the rod-shaped light guiding body, however, there has been a problem that the in-vehicle illuminating device becomes too large in size as a whole in the longitudinal direction since the luminous source must be arranged adjacent to an end face of the end of the rod-shaped light guiding body in parallel therewith.

To address this problem, Japanese unexamined patent publication No. 2000-331522, for example, proposes arranging a luminous source so as to emit light to a direction orthogonal to a longitudinal direction of the rod-shaped light guiding body. However, according to this prior art, there has also been a problem that due to the rod-shaped light guiding body being orthogonal to the luminous flux emitted from the luminous source, it is difficult to efficiently guide the luminous flux emitted from the luminous source into the light guide, thus making it impossible to obtain a bright illuminating device.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

Therefore, in view of the problem described above, it is an object of the present invention to provide an in-vehicle illuminating device capable of efficiently guiding luminous flux emitted from a luminous source.

To attain the above object, the in-vehicle illuminating device according to a first aspect of the present invention includes:

one or more rod-shaped light guiding bodies each having an inner surface, a first end and a second end provided in a longitudinal direction, said rod-shaped light guiding bodies reflecting, on the inner surface, light rays incident from an optical incidence plane provided at the first end thereof to guide the reflected light rays to the second end thereof,

a luminous source arranged in the vicinity of said optical incidence plane, said luminous source emitting light to a direction orthogonal to the longitudinal direction of said rod-shaped light guiding body, and

an light introducing body arranged between said luminous source and said optical incidence plane to introduce luminous flux emitted from said luminous source to said optical incidence plane,

wherein said optical incidence plane is set within a range of the luminous flux emitted from said luminous source.

According to a second aspect of the present invention, said rod-shaped light guiding bodies are two or more, and said light introducing body introduces luminous flux emitted from

said luminous source to the optical incidence planes of said two or more rod-shaped light guiding bodies.

The in-vehicle illuminating device according to the first aspect of the present invention enables the luminous flux emitted from the luminous source to be efficiently guided into the rod-shaped light guiding body. Hence, the device can be improved in illumination efficiency.

The in-vehicle illuminating device according to the second aspect of the present invention enables the emitted luminous flux to be efficiently guided into the optical incidence plane of each rod-shaped light guiding body even if there are two or more rod-shaped light guiding bodies are provided. Hence, the device can be improved in illumination efficiency.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

These objects and other objects and advantages of the present invention will become more apparent upon reading of the following detailed description and the accompanying drawings in which:

FIG. 1 is an overall perspective view illustrating an in-vehicle illuminating device in actual use according to the present embodiment.

FIG. 2 is a perspective view illustrating an overall structure of the in-vehicle illuminating device according to the present embodiment.

FIG. 3 is an exploded perspective view showing the in-vehicle illuminating device according to the present embodiment.

FIG. 4 is a perspective view illustrating a structure of an light introducing body of the in-vehicle illuminating device according to the present embodiment.

FIG. 5 is a perspective view illustrating, in stages, assembling steps for the in-vehicle illuminating device according to the present embodiment, in which

FIG. 5A is a view showing the one prior to the assembling work,

FIG. 5B is a view showing the one with an optical guiding unit assembled,

FIG. 5C is a view showing the one with the optical guiding unit being integrated with the light introducing body, and

FIG. 5D is a view showing the one with the optical guiding unit being integrated with a luminous source unit.

FIG. 6A is a longitudinal section of the in-vehicle illuminating device according to the present embodiment,

FIG. 6B is a longitudinal section of the one according to a comparative example 1,

FIG. 6C is a longitudinal section of the one according to a comparative example 2.

FIG. 7 is a schematic diagram showing an experimental setup for measuring luminance of the in-vehicle illuminating device according to the present embodiment.

FIG. 8 is a graph showing the measurements of luminance of the in-vehicle illuminating device according to the present embodiment.

FIG. 9 is a longitudinal section of a modified example of the in-vehicle illuminating device according to the present embodiment.

FIG. 10 is a perspective view illustrating another modified example of the in-vehicle illuminating device according to the present embodiment.

FIG. 11 is a table illustrating a preferred embodiment and two comparative examples.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

Hereunder is a description of a preferred embodiment of the present invention with reference to the accompanying

drawings. An in-vehicle illuminating device **1** shown in FIG. **1** is mounted on an instrument panel **4** arranged in a vehicle interior **3** of a vehicle **2**. According to the present embodiment, the device **1** is incorporated in a left outlet panel **6** provided at a top of a glove compartment **5** and in a right outlet panel **8** provided at a bottom of a meter panel **7** and is connected electrically with an electric power supply (not shown) through a wire harness L. Thus, the in-vehicle illuminating device **1** mounted on the instrument panel **4** is configured so as to illuminate the instrument panel **4** to thereby permit illumination to be provided to the vehicle interior **3** as an indirect illumination.

As shown in FIG. **2**, the in-vehicle illuminating device **1** is provided with an optical guiding unit **10** and a luminous source unit **11**, which are integrated with each other by means of a base **12**. The optical guiding unit **10** comprises a rod-shaped light guiding body **13** that is held so as to enable the body **13** to be exposed to a surface **10a** on one side of the unit **10**. The rod-shaped light guiding body **13** extends longitudinally from one end **10b** to the second end **10c**. The number of the optical guiding bodies provided herein is two or more, which is two in the embodiment shown in FIG. **2**.

The luminous source unit **11** is arranged at one end **10b** of the optical guiding unit **10** so that light can be supplied from the end **10b** to the optical guiding unit **10**. The luminous source unit **11** is formed on a surface **10d** on the other side of the optical guiding unit **10** in a protuberant manner and emits luminous flux in a direction orthogonal to the longitudinal direction of the optical guiding unit **10**.

According to the in-vehicle illuminating device **1** thus structured, the surface **10d** on the other side of the optical guiding unit **10** is allowed to abut against, e.g., a surface of the left outlet panel **6** and then the luminous source unit **11** formed in a protuberant manner on the surface **10d** is inserted into a hole (not shown) formed beforehand in the left output panel **6** to thereby be mounted thereon. According to the in-vehicle illuminating device **1**, therefore, the surface **10d** on the other side of the optical guiding unit **10** is not exposed to the surface of the instrument panel **4** and hence a portion exposed onto the surface of the instrument panel **4** can be wholly made low-profile.

The optical guiding unit **10**, as shown in FIG. **3**, includes the rod-shaped light guiding body **13** and a holder **15**. The rod-shaped light guiding body **13** comprises columnar linear members, for which may be preferably used optical fibers (not shown) comprising a core and a clad. An optical incidence plane **16** is formed at end **13a** of the rod-shaped light guiding body **13**. The optical incidence plane **16** is made up of a plane defined by cutting the end **13a** of the rod-shaped light guiding body **13** perpendicularly to the longitudinal direction of the rod-shaped light guiding body **13**.

The holder **15** comprises a plastic member designed so as to be capable of holding the two rod-shaped light guiding bodies **13** from the other side surface thereof. In the present embodiment, the holder **15** is slightly shorter than the rod-shaped light guiding body **13** and is formed with two grooves, approximately semicircular in cross-section, extending in parallel in the longitudinal direction on one side surface of the holder **15**. Then, the holder **15** is allowed to be integrated with the rod-shaped light guiding bodies **13** by fitting the rod-shaped light guiding bodies **13** into the grooves.

The luminous source unit **11** includes a casing **18**, a lamp **19** acting as a luminous source, and the light introducing body **20** and is designed so as to light the lamp **19** using an electric power supplied via the wire harness L. On a second end in the longitudinal direction of the casing **18** is provided a connector insertion hole **21** for connecting a connector (not shown)

formed at the end of the wire harness L. Then, electric power fed via the connector and the wire harness L is applied to the lamp built in the casing **18**. Here, an LED may be suitably employed as the lamp **19**.

The base **12** comprises a rubber member, e.g., EPDM (Ethylene Propylene Diene Monomer) rubber and includes a light guide holder **23** and a luminous source holder **24**. The light guide holder **23** is designed so as to be capable of detachably fixing the holder **15** integrated with the rod-shaped light guiding body **13**. According to the present embodiment, the light guide holder **23** comprises a rectangular frame body composed of a linear portion **25** and an end **26** which envelops one end of the linear portion **25**. A surface **23a** on one side of the light guide holder **23** is opened, while a surface **23b** on the other side is provided with a bottom plate **27**. This light guide holder **23** allows the optical guiding unit **10** to be inserted therethrough from the surface **23a** to fix the holder **15** so that it is integrated with the optical guiding unit **10**. Further, a two-sided adhesive tape, not shown, is provided on the surface **23b** on the other side of the light guide holder **23**.

The luminous source holder **24** comprises a frame body formed, in a protruding manner, on the surface **23b** on the other side on the end of the light guide holder **23**, and is designed so as to be capable of holding the luminous source unit **11**.

As shown in FIG. **4**, the light introducing body **20** comprises a member having a hemispherical inner surface and includes a lamp hole **30** for inserting the lamp **19** therinto, and light guide holes **31** for inserting the ends **13a** of the rod-shaped light guiding bodies **13**. The lamp hole **30** is opened in a direction orthogonal to the light guide hole **31**. Further, an inner end of each light guide hole **31** is connected with a hemispherical inner surface **20a**. The end **13a** of the rod-shaped light guiding body **13** inserted therinto abuts against the inner surface **20a** to thereby permit the rod-shaped light guiding body **13** to be held at a given position. The light introducing body **20** thus structured forms a closed space so that light of the lamp **19** does not leak to any outside portion other than the rod-shaped light guiding body **13**. Furthermore, the inner surface **20a** of the light introducing body **20** comprises a reflecting surface such as a mirrored surface so that the luminous flux emitted by the lamp **19** can be efficiently guided to the end **13a** of the rod-shaped light guiding body **13**.

Further, as shown in FIG. **5(A)**, the casing **18** is provided with a light introducing body insertion section **32** for inserting the light introducing body **20** therinto. The light introducing body insertion section **32** is opened in a direction orthogonal to the longitudinal direction of the casing **18** and is incorporated with the lamp **19**.

Next is a description of a method for assembling each component described above. First, the rod-shaped light guiding body **13** is fitted into the holder **15** to obtain the optical guiding unit **10** (see FIG. **5(B)**). In this fitting process, the end **13a** of the rod-shaped light guiding body **13** is allowed to protrude from the end **15a** of the holder **15**. Next, the end **13a** of the rod-shaped light guiding body **13** which has been protruded from the end **15a** of the holder **15** is inserted into the light guide hole **31** of the light introducing body **20** to integrate the optical guiding unit **10** and the light introducing body **20** with each other (see FIG. **5(C)**).

Then, the light introducing body insertion section **32** is inserted into the lamp hole **30** of the light introducing body **20** to integrate the optical guiding unit **10** and the luminous source unit **11** with each other (see FIG. **5(D)**). Here, in order to permit the luminous flux emitted from the lamp **19** to be efficiently guided to the rod-shaped light guiding body **13**, the

light introducing body 20 holds the optical incidence plane 16 formed at the end 13a of the rod-shaped light guiding body 13 at a given position in relation to the lamp 19, i.e., at such a position that allows the optical incidence plane 16 to be arranged in a zone defined within a given range of the luminous flux emitted from the lamp 19. Here, the language “a zone defined within the given range of the luminous flux emitted” means the one ranging from a center of the lamp 19 to an outer edge of the lamp 19 adjacent to the light guide hole 31. According to the present embodiment, it is preferable that the light introducing body 20 holds the optical incidence plane 16, as shown in FIG. 6(A), in a zone δ between the inner surface of the light introducing body insertion section 32 adjacent to the light guide hole 31 and a central axis A, where the central axis A denotes the axis passing through the center of the lamp 19.

In this manner, the optical guiding unit 10 is integrated with the luminous source unit 11, and then, the luminous source unit 11 is inserted into the luminous source holder 24 and at the same time the holder 15 is fixed by the light guide holder 23, thereby obtaining the in-vehicle illuminating device 1 (see FIG. 2).

Next is a description of action and effect of each section in the in-vehicle illuminating device 1 thus structured. The in-vehicle illuminating device 1 according to the present embodiment is provided with the lamp 19 which emits light to the direction orthogonal to the longitudinal direction of the rod-shaped light guiding body 13. The lamp 19 is provided on the surface 10d located on the other side where the rod-shaped light guiding body 13 is not exposed. Hence, when the in-vehicle illuminating device 1 is mounted on the instrument panel 4, the thickness of the portion thereof that is exposed on the instrument panel 4 can be reduced.

Further, the light guide 20 allows the optical incidence plane 16 to be arranged in the zone defined within a range of the luminous flux emitted from the luminous source 16. Hence, the rod-shaped light guiding body 13 reflects, on its inner surface, light rays incident from the optical incidence plane 16 to guide the light rays reflected to the second end 10c of the optical guiding unit 10 provided in the longitudinal direction. Therefore, the in-vehicle illuminating device 1 can provide the light rays throughout the optical guiding unit 10 from the first end 10b to the second end 10c thereof.

For the in-vehicle illuminating device 1, the relation between the luminance of the rod-shaped light guiding body 13 and the relative position of the optical incidence plane 16 formed on the end 13a of the rod-shaped light guiding body 13 with respect to the lamp 19 was investigated in such a manner as shown in FIG. 7. The in-vehicle illuminating device 1 was fixed to a vertical wall W so that the longitudinal direction of the rod-shaped light guiding body 13 was aligned with the horizontal direction, and then the luminance of the rod-shaped light guiding body 13 was measured by a color luminance meter 40 (Topcon BM-5A) located one meter apart from the surface of the rod-shaped light guiding body 13.

Three test pieces were prepared by changing the above-mentioned relative position (hereinafter simply represented by an insertion length). Namely, the first test piece where the optical incidence plane 16 was aligned with the central axis A with the insertion length of 0 mm, shown in FIG. 6(A), as one working example of the present embodiment where the optical incidence plane 16 was held in the zone δ defined between the inner surface of the introducing body insertion hole 32 adjacent to the light guide hole 31 and the central axis A; the second test piece with the insertion length of 1 mm as a comparative example 1, shown in FIG. 6(B) where the optical incidence plane 16 of the rod-shaped light guiding body 13

passed over the central axis A of the lamp 19 to protrude by 1 mm from the central axis A; and the third test piece with the insertion length of -5 mm as a comparative example 2, shown in FIG. 6(C) where the optical incidence plane 16 of the rod-shaped light guiding body 13 was located 5 mm short of the central axis A of the lamp 19. The luminance was measured at three positions, “entrance” in the vicinity of the optical incidence plane 16 of the rod-shaped light guiding body 13, “center” in the vicinity of the central portion of the rod-shaped light guiding body 13, and “exit” in the vicinity of the second end of the rod-shaped light guiding body 13. The results measured are shown in Table 1 and FIG. 8.

The results indicated that as compared to the test piece with the insertion length of 0 mm (the working example of the embodiment), both of the test pieces with the insertion length of 1 mm (comparative example 1) and -5 mm (comparative example 2) exhibited the reduced luminance anywhere in the rod-shaped light guiding body 13.

Consequently, according to the in-vehicle illuminating device 1 where the optical incidence plane 16 is set in the zone δ defined between the inner surface of the introducing body insertion section 32 adjacent to the light guide hole 31 and the central axis A of the lamp 19, e.g., the optical incidence plane 16 is aligned with the central axis of the lamp 19, the luminous flux emitted from the lamp 19 can be efficiently guided to the rod-shaped light guiding body 13.

The present invention is not limited to the foregoing embodiments and various modifications are possible within the scope of the gist of the present invention. For example, although the optical incidence plane 16 formed at the end 13a of the rod-shaped light guiding body 13 is defined by the place cut vertically relative to its longitudinal direction, the present invention is not limited thereto. As shown in FIG. 9, for example, the optical incidence plane may be constituted of a plane tilting downward as it comes close to its distal end, assuming that the side having the lamp hole 30 is defined as upside. Further, whilst the two rod-shaped light guiding bodies are provided in the present embodiment, the present invention is not limited thereto. Three or more rod-shaped light guiding bodies, for example, seven rod-shaped light guiding bodies may be employed as shown in FIG. 10. In this case, a light introducing body 41 may allow the rod-shaped light guiding bodies 13 to be arranged radially around the lamp hole 30 provided in the central portion. Since such in-vehicle illuminating device 1 enables the rod-shaped light guiding bodies 13 to be arranged so as to cover a 360-degree field around the lamp 19, it may be mounted on a ceiling or the like of the vehicle interior 3 to permit light to be distributed in an extensive range.

What is claimed is:

1. An in-vehicle illuminating device, comprising:
 - one or more rod-shaped light guiding bodies each having an inner surface, a first end and a second end provided in a longitudinal direction, said one or more rod-shaped light guiding bodies reflecting, on the inner surface, light rays incident on an optical incidence plane provided at the first end thereof to guide the reflected light rays to the second end thereof,
 - a luminous source arranged in the vicinity of said optical incidence plane, said luminous source emitting light in a direction orthogonal to the longitudinal direction of said one or more rod-shaped light guiding bodies, and
 - a light introducing body arranged between said luminous source and said optical incidence plane, said light introducing body comprising a reflecting surface on the inner

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surface to introduce, via said reflecting surface, luminous flux emitted from said luminous source to said optical incidence plane,

wherein said light introducing body includes a lamp hole for inserting said luminous source therethrough and a light guide hole for inserting the end of said rod-shaped light guiding body therethrough, said lamp hole being opened in a direction orthogonal to said light guide hole, and

wherein an inner end of said light guide hole is connected with said inner surface of said light introducing body, and the end of said rod-shaped light guiding body inserted therein abuts against said inner surface of said light introducing body, to thereby permit said rod-shaped light guiding body to be held at a position in which said optical incidence plane is within a range of the luminous flux emitted from said luminous source.

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- 2. The in-vehicle illuminating device according to claim 1, wherein said rod-shaped light guiding bodies are two or more, and wherein said light introducing body introduces luminous flux emitted from said luminous source to optical incidence planes of each of said two or more rod-shaped light guiding bodies.
- 3. The in-vehicle illuminating device according to claim 1, wherein said light introducing body has a hemispherical inner surface.
- 4. The in-vehicle illuminating device according to claim 1, wherein said rod-shaped light guiding body whose end is inserted into said light guide hole allows the optical incidence plane thereof to be arranged between a central axis of said luminous source and an outer surface of said luminous source adjacent to said light guide hole.

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